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ABSTRACT

Because most military children will be enrolled in public schools at some point, an understanding of military children can assist educators in working with such children and, more broadly, with mobile children from other backgrounds. Following an introduction providing information on the numbers of military children and their unique issues, this fastback describes some of the challenges posed by high mobility as seen in the military child population, including those related to calendars and schedules, school records, classes and credits, state testing, and emotional needs. The fastback then suggests strategies, such as local and institutional partnerships, that educators can use to assist military children in building their capacity for adaptability. (Contains 25 references.) (EV)

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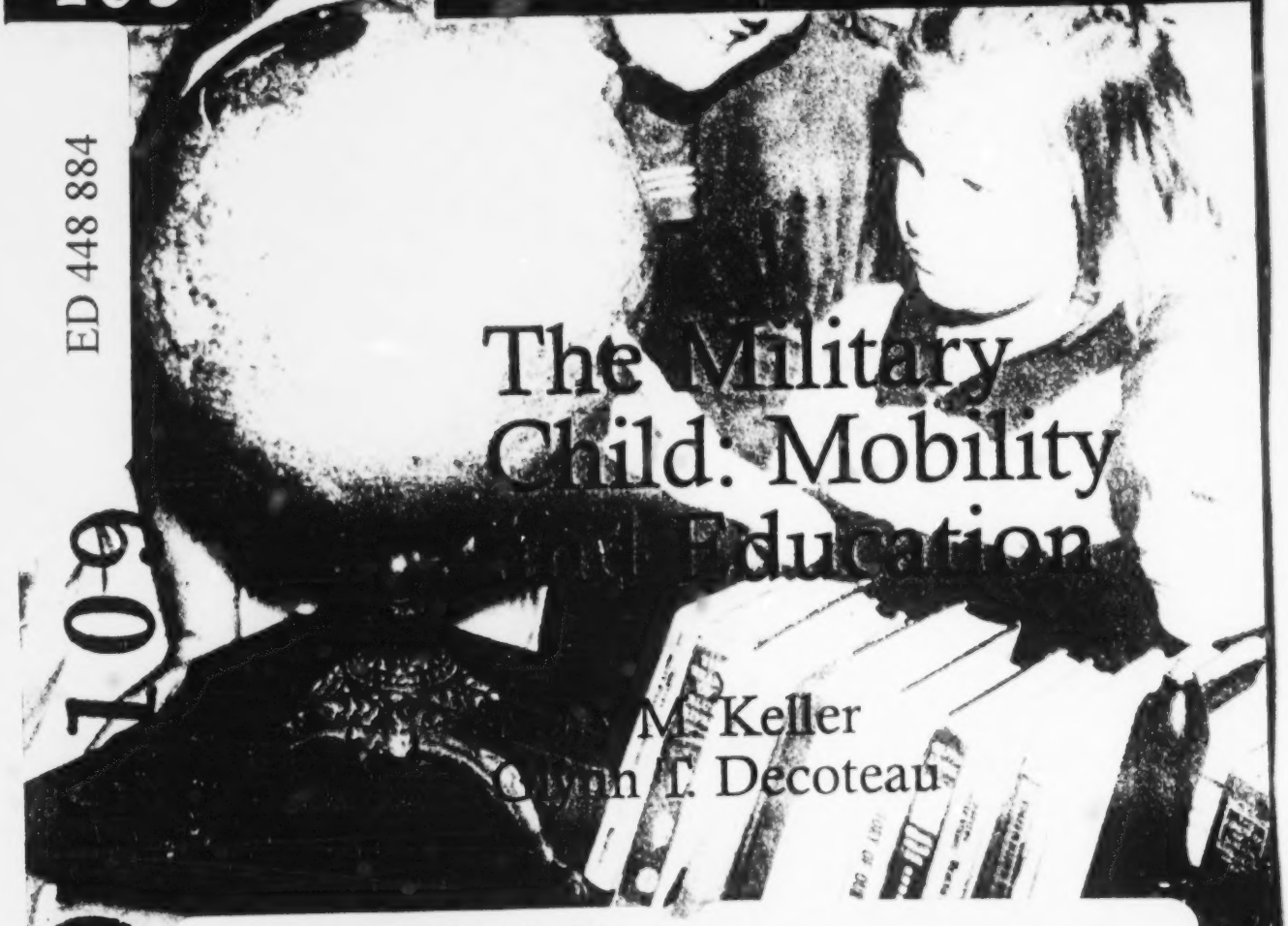

The Military Child: Mobility and Education

M. Keller
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Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

The Military Child: Mobility and Education

by
Mary M. Keller
and
Glynn T. Decoteau

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Table of Contents

Introduction 7

A Study in Adaptability 10

Challenges Related to Mobility 14

Addressing the Issues 20
- Calendars and Schedules 21
- School Records 22
- Classes and Credits 24
- State Testing 25
- Emotional Needs 27

Partnerships and Possibilities 29
- Local Partnerships 30
- Institutional Partnerships 31
- A World of Possibilities 33

References 35

Introduction

General Henry H. Shelton, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave a speech to educators in Arlington, Virginia, in October 1998 and recounted how an elementary teacher once asked, "Who packed up all their belongings and moved far away on the ship, *Mayflower*?" His son responded, "The Sheltons. And the Mayflower is not a ship; it's a moving van." Shelton and his family had moved 26 times in his 34-year military career.

Mobility has become a way of life in American society. It is increasingly less common today for a child to attend school from kindergarten through high school graduation in the same hometown. Many families move occasionally, as a result of employment decisions, either theirs or their company's. Others seem to move often.

Most military students, more than a half-million, attend schools in one of 600 civilian public school districts. Currently, 124,000 children are enrolled in schools run by the Department of Defense (Jowers 1999*b*).

Parents on active military duty expect to sacrifice certain comforts. Often less acknowledged, however, is the

sacrifice made by their children. Military children tend to grow up in a family environment that is marked, on the plus side, by closeness in the face of adventure and sometimes hardship and, on the minus side, by frequent transitions and uncertainty. Military children learn early on about moving, saying goodbye, being a new kid on the block, and, most unfortunate, being separated from a parent for extended periods.

Military assignments increasingly involve numerous deployments even after reaching a permanent duty station. Children learn quickly about saying goodbye, moving, being the new kid, and, increasingly, separation from a parent for a long time.

In the most pragmatic terms, treating military families as an integral part of the life of an effective service member pays off in reenlistment. In today's high-tech military, recruiting and training are costly, and reenlistments help contain those costs. But the mobility of military life is a constant. Some interesting statistics may help illuminate this life, as noted by former Army Chief of Staff General Dennis J. Reimer (March 1999):

- Sixty-six percent of soldiers are married.
- Military couples (dual careers) number some 19,000.
- Some 3.7% of single soldiers are parents.

The children of soldiers — affectionately known as Army brats (in other branches, Navy brats, Air Force brats, and so on) — enjoy unparalleled opportunities for travel, often to historic or exotic locales. They grow comfortable in interacting with people of different cultures

who speak different languages. They gain a global perspective that few students experience. They tend to develop close family ties in spite of physical separation. They learn how to be flexible. They become self-assured. They learn how to make friends and how to keep friends even when they move away. These are the positives.

But there is a negative side as well. Military children often encounter and must deal with the unknown: new schools, new communities, new teachers, new friends, new cultures and customs. Mobility can disrupt emotional and social well-being. And academics may suffer. Some students develop remarkable resilience; others do not.

Most military children at some time — often several different times — will be enrolled in public schools, many of which are located near military facilities that do not include a separate school system for the children of military personnel. Thus an understanding of military children can assist educators in working with such children and, more broadly, with mobile children from other backgrounds.

A Study in Adaptability

Military children share common experiences that reach across generations. Many military offspring are born in overseas hospitals, thus giving them dual citizenship status. Their earliest recollection may be of bugle sounds, ceremonies for the American flag, and absence of one or both parents during field training, sea duty, or deployment. During the Cold War, military children often were awakened by sirens during practice "alerts." Dependent evacuation practice meant placing cherished toys and personal items with the family emergency kit of food, medicine, blankets, clothing, and valuables.

Elementary-age military children can present seasoned travel seminars on the experience of long airplane trips through multiple time zones followed by jet lag. High school upperclassmen face challenges as they plan visits to stateside colleges from their homes in Europe, Korea, Japan, or the Middle East.

Whether in the United States or outside its borders, beginning at a new school becomes almost a biennial

event for many military children. One leaves good friends and makes new ones, sometimes reuniting with old friends from a previous duty station in, say, New York, Omaha, or Spain. Often such moves involve disuniting or reuniting families. Both can be hard on the military child, and reuniting after extended deployment can be a double-edged sword, almost as stressful for families as is separation. Fathers or mothers, or both, are subject to overseas deployments, assignments to combat zones, or peacekeeping missions where rotations can last from six months to a year. There is a real element of danger in these deployments that may not have been present during the Cold War.

Today's trend toward longer assignments at the permanent duty station notwithstanding, the military parent's absence from home actually is increasing in frequency. This trend has arisen from the "draw-down" (military parlance for downsizing) of the U.S. military from Gulf War levels and current policies that involve military peacekeeping operations in such hot spots as Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Middle East. As of March 1999, 32,000 soldiers were assigned to more than 70 countries, with an additional 125,000 military personnel stationed throughout the world to protect U.S. national interests and to support the national security strategy (Reimer 1999).

As military students enter public, parochial, and private schools, they present unique challenges to teachers and administrators who may not know or appreciate the military culture that shapes these students' lives. The military student is hard to define, given the variances in

duty station, mission, and job description of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and so on. But a composite example may be helpful. The typical U.S. Army officer's high school child, for instance, probably was born overseas and made at least one transoceanic crossing before the age of five. He or she has transferred to perhaps eight different school systems, enrolling for two to three years in a Department of Defense overseas school and probably in schools in Kentucky, Kansas, Wisconsin, Louisiana, and Texas. These states have some of the larger Army facilities.

The most common feature shared by military children is mobility. And mobility, particularly of parents, is still an unusual stressor in the general teen population. Military adolescents at Walter Reed described it this way:

> Are we stressed? Sometimes moderately, sometimes massively, but almost always 'Yes!' but then again, isn't everybody stressed a lot one way or another these days? Of course, you have to understand that *our* stressors are often different from those of our peers, so we can't always use the same ways they do to relieve the stress. Sometimes it never seems to even let up a little bit. One or both of our parents can get suddenly deployed (oops, sorry) that means sent somewhere that could be dangerous or cause them to be away for a long time, or they can get hurt; or we can get sent to an awful place for three years, like it or not; or our parent or parents can get sent, but we have to stay. Things like that. (Rice et al. 1998)

Counselors and teachers should have an understanding of and sensitivity to the turmoil affecting these

students in order to promote their social and emotional resiliency and their academic progress. Conversely, indifference or a lack of awareness of the stressors associated with frequent mobility and separation can have a detrimental effect. Professional development, organizational structures, and military installation-school partnerships are needed to support and encourage educators to view America's military students with acceptance and compassion.

Despite the stresses from mobility, many military children become increasingly resilient through personal experiences, such as leaving friends and adjusting to new surroundings. Through no fault of their own, they are forced to live a nomadic academic life with all of its attendant rules, relationships, and requisite trials.

When educators are informed about the life of the military student, they know not to "treat them all the same." There are many challenges for these young people. And though it can be said that having to jump through hoops builds character, that is insufficient reason to justify insensitivity or additional barriers.

In the next sections of this fastback, we will describe some of the challenges posed by high mobility as seen in the military child population and then suggest some strategies that educators can use to assist military children in building their capacity for adaptability.

Challenges Related to Mobility

Mobility is a fact of life for many American families. Not only does it affect individuals, it also affects the institutions these individuals use. Thus how a school accommodates mobile students will have much to do with how mobile students fare. The latter issue usually is cast in terms of academic performance, but social and emotional well-being also are at issue.

A tenet of the movement for high academic standards for all students is continuity of instruction. Unfortunately, state standards and the alignment of local curricula and instruction assume a relatively static population. For example, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills documents build sequentially, grade upon grade, class upon class, based on a standard Texas curriculum. This sequence accommodates students who attend Texas schools from start to finish, but what about students who move to Texas from other states or abroad?

In their 1998 article, Michael X. Mao and his colleagues detail the relationship between student transition and academic performance in Texas. They did not treat

military students as a discrete population, but their findings describe the challenges faced by all mobile children. Mao and his colleagues write:

> Mobility rates are higher for economically disadvantaged students than for students who are not economically disadvantaged. Mobility rates also are higher for students who are identified as being at risk of dropping out, who are receiving special education services, and who are receiving career and technology education than for their counterparts. These all are [special program] student groups that frequently demonstrate lower performance on the TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills], regardless of their mobility. Students participating in gifted and talented programs are less likely to move than their classmates who are not in these programs. Ethnic minority students generally are more mobile than White students. (Mao et al. 1998, p. 13)

Had a representative sample of students in military families been included, the reasons given for student mobility would have been different. In the military, all families are subject to moving. Military families represent all economic and ethnic groups, and so special-program, economically disadvantaged, and minority populations are not overrepresented. Military orders are the impetus for mobility and the sole reason for moving from one school to another. The result is that mobility is the rule, not the exception for the military child.

Mao and his colleagues used results from Texas' state test (TAAS) to illustrate the adverse effect of mobility on academic performance:

> On average, the academic performance of mobile students is worse than that of stable students. The percentage of mobile students meeting minimum expectations on the TAAS mathematics or reading tests is much lower than it is for their stable counterparts at all grade levels. The gaps between groups . . . tend to increase with the students' grade level: the higher the grade level, the larger the gap.
>
> In aggregate, over a one-year period, mobile students' reading and mathematics TLI (Texas Learner Index) scores show smaller gains or greater losses than the changes in performance shown by students who did not move.
>
> The less frequent the mobility, the better the academic performance.
>
> The earlier in the year the move, the higher the achievement. . . .
>
> The student turnover rate in a school is negatively associated with other school/district performance indicators, such as the state school accountability rating, the percentage of students passing all TAAS tests taken, and the percentage of graduates taking the SAT/ACT. (Mao et al. 1998, pp. 13-14)

In these times of high-stakes accountability, schools are concerned about the inclusion of mobile students in performance ratings, especially depending on when the student moved into the system. Thus Mao and his colleagues comment:

> Findings from this study of student mobility support the practice of excluding the performance of students who move into the district late in the school year from campus and district accountability ratings prepared by

> the state education agency. The later in the school year students move, the less well they tend to perform on TAAS and the less time districts have to help them adjust to the disruption in their academic progress. (p. 14)

The Texas state data are not sufficiently stratified to sort for students in military families. However, the individual school districts that serve military children are aware of the needs of this population and probably would not agree that military students' performance reflects the description above. Generally, the performance of the military dependent student is higher than the performance of mobile students as a whole and, in some cases, is higher than the nonmilitary student populations with similar demographic descriptors.

The military also is very aware of the challenges that mobility brings. In a June 1999 press conference before the Military Child Education Coalition Conference, General Michael E. Ryan, Chief of Staff of the Air Force and a father and former military brat, spoke from his own experience of the many challenges facing today's military child:

> We will discuss how to be consistent within each school as families move from base to base. Every time a family moves, it's a challenge for the child. . . . All commanders, whether stateside or overseas, are deeply involved in the school programs. Children have special challenges, and we are trying to make it better for them. (Ryan 1999)

Other challenges associated with high mobility include:

- *Curriculum differences*, which can result in students having to repeat classes if one school's credits are not accepted by the intake school.
- *Grading system differences and differences related to class rank*, which can mean that the student must give up hard-earned academic standing on moving to a new school with a different grading system.
- *Credit variances*, which can mean that students will be awarded a different number of credits than at a previous school because of combined classes, block schedules, or other factors.
- *Graduation requirement differences*, which can impede school completion because the number of credits for graduation and the specific classes required are not standard from school to school.

Participants in the Military Child Conference held in Killeen, Texas, in June 1997, which included more than 200 educators, parents, active-duty military personnel, and other interested persons, engaged in identifying the education challenges faced by transitioning military students. They identified the following issues:

- *Records*. Current records are needed. Parents should hand-carry records. Schools need to develop the capacity for electronic transfer of records.
- *Advance information*. Parents need to know a school's curriculum, standards, grading policy, etc., before a transfer. Teachers need advance notice of incoming students.
- *Transition buddies*. Students need to be assigned buddies in the new school to help them adjust to unfamiliar facilities, procedures, and so on.

- *Transition time.* Teachers and incoming students need time to work together to make a smooth transition to the new school. Transition labs might help.
- *Orientation.* Teachers need inservice training to orient them to the nature of the military child and mobility factors that should affect how they teach such students.

Communities need to implement cooperative efforts among schools, city and county governments, and state governments to address those issues affecting both military and other mobile students. Educators and public officials at all levels should examine the resources and programs available to help mobile students make a smooth transition into a new school.

Addressing the Issues

Admiral Richard Mies, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command (June 1999), commented,

> I don't think either of my daughters has ever really forgiven me for [their] having to go, in their senior year, to a brand new school. These sorts of family issues are becoming more important to service members . . . I can tell you from my personal experience that far more career decisions are being made based on what's good for the family than what's good for the service member.

While Mies' comments reflect a more family-oriented military than in past years, there are still many issues related to mobility that schools must address. In the previous section we sketch some of those issues. In this section we describe some ways in which those issues can be addressed by schools.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) was formed as a result of a 1997 conference held in Killeen, Texas, sponsored by the Killeen Independent School District and the Fort Hood military installation. This conference provided a forum for discussing the needs of military children, with the goals of:

- Developing information to support the transitions of military students.
- Developing an alliance among school districts for the purpose of communication.
- Determining support that military installations can provide to local schools.

Among the issues addressed at the conference were matters involving school records and their interpretation, school schedules (especially block versus traditional scheduling), parent communication, curricula, and emotional issues. Following is a closer look at some specific issues.

Calendars and Schedules

Maintaining a balanced life in any family at the beginning of the 21st century is no easy feat. This is especially true for a military family. The military mission moves families with little regard to either time of calendar year or consideration of school year. While it is widely believed that the services move most families in the summer or during the Christmas/mid-year break, in fact, most military families (77% in 1998) relocate in the summer (Gilmore 1999).

Though most military families move in the summer, that may not have much meaning because of the variety of school calendars across the nation and in other countries. Sandy Schwartz, wife of General Thomas Schwartz, is a veteran of 29 moves in 32 years. During a conference presentation in June 1999, she asked, "What is summer?" It was a valid question. "Summer"

can vary. For example, a high school student who moves after Labor Day, the traditional end of summer, to Fort Sill in Oklahoma could be in for a surprise when he or she discovers that the Lawton Public Schools start in early August.

Any time a student moves during the school year can be stressful. As standards and requirements have increased, school administrators increasingly have turned to innovative scheduling; but the proliferation of "nonstandard" schedules has added to the discomfort of students who move. Lengthened school years and increased graduation requirements add to that stress.

Information is the key to a smoother transition. The old saying is "forewarned is forearmed." Parents who obtain information about school year calendars and schedules will be better able to make judgments about the transition. Schools can assist by developing packets for prospective students. In addition, the World Wide Web is becoming an increasingly vital tool for schools to communicate about themselves.

School Records

Transferring school records can be time-consuming and problematic. But records are essential for students to be placed correctly and for credits and classes to be recognized.

One solution can be for parents to hand-carry their children's school records. However, this solution can be troublesome. Although a federal statute, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), gives parents a proprietary right in their minor student's records,

many schools do not consider records brought by parents as "official." Thus personally delivering records does little to mitigate the delay caused by a school's need to request and receive "official" records.

Electronic transfer would facilitate transitions for military and other mobile students, but in most cases schools do not have this capacity. In its place, faxed transcripts can ease the transition, to be replaced later by mailed copies. The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) has taken steps to explore secure electronic transfers of records. MCEC, in cooperation with the Killeen Independent School District, has created a "virtual high school student," named "Larry Longhorn," solely for the purpose of testing the feasibility of electronic transfer systems and the processes for interpreting transcripts. It has not been very successful. In a telephone interview with Karen Jowers of the *Army Times*, Mary Keller, one of authors of this fastback and an assistant superintendent, commented in frustration, "It is amazing. We can move billions of dollars in the banking system around the country, but we have trouble getting Larry from Texas to Missouri" (Jowers 1999*a*, p. 12).

Joanne Shimasaki, a coordinator for the Army's Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, advises parents of exceptional children to personally deliver copies of all program records, especially those related to an Individual Education Plan (IEP). "It would also be helpful for parents to get a personal letter from the child's teacher written to the next teacher with information on how to better work with the student," Shimasaki said (Wilcox 1999).

Hand-carrying a letter from the teacher or counselor is an excellent idea for all military students, not only for students in special programs. This is especially true if the student is moving during the school year or is in high school. Military students will be applying to colleges and will need recommendations to accompany their transcripts.

Finally, military installations need to incorporate school-record clearance in the out-processing of military service members. The U.S. Army already has in place a servicewide directive, Army Regulation 600-8-101, which encourages such a practice.

Classes and Credits

To say that school systems supporting military installations do not have a common set of standards is not entirely true. Common bonds have been created through the national conversation about curriculum standards and the wide political and public acceptance of test-based reform strategies (Heubert and Hauser 1999, p. 14). This is good news for mobile students. What is not in place — and because of states' rights and local control likely never will be — is a standardized or unified system for curricula expectations, prerequisites for access to academic programs, and graduation requirements. The absence of standardization leads to confusing and frustrating high school plans, redundancies, and inconsistent education opportunities for transitioning students.

However, there is a bright spot. Forty-nine states have established standards as an outgrowth of the national

standards movement (Iowa is the exception). Doyle comments:

> So [how much do] the 49 sets of standards differ, each from the other? Not surprisingly, the short answer is "not much." Truth be told, there is no Portland, Oregon, math vs. Portland, Maine, math, anymore than there is Arizona science vs. Pennsylvania science. (1999, p. 56)

But small differences can be magnified for the mobile student, and so, again, the real solution is for parents and schools to communicate clearly and specifically in advance of a transition. And, again, school websites are becoming increasingly handy for students and parents to obtain information prior to moving.

State Testing

High-stakes tests and state-level policy decisions regarding standards and assessments generally do not consider the effect on the mobile military student. The direct effect often is test redundancy and wasted time. For many military children there is a likelihood that they will be tested and retested as a result of moving from school to school. In every state a new test awaits, and so there is a cycle of preparation and testing that repeats.

Especially for high school students, this testing redundancy can become burdensome. In the absence of deliberate and reliable methods that link, equate, or even translate the 48 different state assessments, military families are on their own. As one parent commented, "If we had it to do over again, I don't think we would move the family" (Wilcox 1999, p. 1). Some military par-

ents, in fact, make arrangements to leave their children at a prior duty station if they are transferred during the students' high school years. But this creates other problems related to the separation of parents and children during crucial adolescent years.

As of this writing, 19 states require students to pass an exit exam in order to graduate from high school. As more states adopt this high-stakes testing strategy, the redundancy and related problems likely will increase for military families, unless an effort is undertaken to coordinate test requirements and share test results.

Coping with testing when one moves between school years is difficult enough, but it can raise insurmountable barriers for the student who moves *during* the school year. In 17 of the states that require an exit exam, there are 124 military installations. Thus graduation testing affects large populations of highly mobile military students. This is a problem that cries out for a solution.

The larger question may be stated more simply: How valid are high-stakes tests for mobile students? For example, if the Virginia state-mandated test covers Virginia history, how fair is it to test students who move to the state and have not yet had the opportunity to study Virginia history? Considering both fairness and due process, is it possible to provide reasonable and adequate notice of the stakes involved in such a test and its effect on students' academic careers? The Supreme Court held in *Debra P.* v. *Turlington* (1981) that the adequate notification standard was a minimum of four years (Alexander and Alexander 1985; Phillips 1996).

At a minimum, some credit for passing a similar exam elsewhere would be a partial solution. "What we see is

there may be some need to have reciprocity agreements," suggests Joyce W. Raezer, deputy associate director of government relations for the National Military Family Association, an Alexandria-based nonprofit group that attempts to address military family concerns.

Emotional Needs

All students, but especially students who do not adjust well in the face of transition stress, may find that learning after a move to a new location is impeded or diminished. The cause of this is called *downshifting*, which is a psychophysiological response by the brain to a perceived threat or an unpleasant experience or association. According to Caine and Caine, "Downshifted learners . . . bypass much of their capacity for high-order functioning and creative thought" (1997, p. 19). Thus it is important for educators and parents to provide adequate emotional support during a transition in order to reduce this period of downshifting and to help move the student toward full adjustment as soon as possible.

One Army briefing paper states it this way:

> Simply put, even without the cloud of downshifting, our military students worry they are not learning the content as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Instead of thinking about the physics lab, an entering military student, missing his best friend, is worrying about who he will eat lunch with. In the same classroom, a military student with a move imminent is in knots of concern about whether or not she will have as many close friends in dance class at the new high school, assuming that dance is offered. The teacher is worried because two

> of her students are inattentive for some reason. It is a vignette about pain, disconnectedness, grieving, and fear rather than optimal time on task and engaged learning. (Rice et al. 1998)

Strong families make all the difference in providing a stable structure during transitions. LTG (Ret.) H.G. "Pete" Taylor reinforced this essential message when he spoke to the participants of the 1997 Supporting the Military Child Conference. He urged awareness that "the family is the single most important factor in a child's education." Thus educators, individually and collectively working with the military services, can offer social and emotional support by working with parents and students before and after transitions. Parent involvement is the key. This is especially true for the 46,000 active-duty men and women who are single parents (Jowers 1999*b*).

Partnerships and Possibilities

Most military children are amazingly resilient. Catherine Ahl, a Navy parent and the Puget Sound Area Representative for the National Military Family Association, commented, "Both of my kids moved during their senior year, which turned out to be harder on me than on them. They adjusted real well, but I just knew it would ruin their lives" (Wold 1998, p. A3).

Partnerships between parents, educators, and military personnel can help parents, as well as students, feel more confident that all will be well through multiple transitions. Partnerships also help to mitigate the effects of the "givens" of moving. Taylor sums up as follows:

> In considering how to make things better for military children as they move from school to school we must recognize that there are two "givens". . . the military services will continue to move military families on a periodic basis. It is required by the mission . . . and since one of the enduring values of our nation is state and local control of education, the school they move to will always be different from the one they left. (1999)

One way to think about partnerships is to consider them as two concentric circles with the military child at the center. These circles of partnership include local partnerships and institutional partnerships.

Local Partnerships

Each community that serves military children is unique. Therefore, a "one size fits all" solution is impossible. Partnerships between school districts and military installations must be localized to the conditions and concerns present there. John Deegan, executive director of the Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA) and superintendent of the Bellevue School District in Nebraska, comments that an effective partnership is a safety net of sensitivity and accommodation woven together by the time and talent of caring persons from both military installation and the supporting school system (Deegan 1999).

Essential relationships between institutions do not thrive and flourish without skillful individuals tending them. Key leaders from post or base and school must interact continually. It is through interaction that consideration of the missions to which each is committed becomes second nature. Senior leaders as model partners must sincerely and consistently exemplify the standard, then expect staff to learn about the challenges and the culture of the military life.

Encouraging local installation/school partnerships recognizes and celebrates the local citizenry as key players in determining how children will be educated and

how accountability standards for teaching, learning, and assessment will be set. Caring communities of informed, concerned citizens, educators, and military and political leaders can discover and monitor what works for the military child, while respecting the independent responsibility of the local school boards to educate youth. Customizing solutions and reacting to serendipitous realizations, unexpected challenges, or exciting opportunities require both dexterity and synchronized effort. Consistent communication and informed appreciation at the local level will go a long, long way toward achieving a balanced and lasting safety net for the sake of the child. The investment in a genuine partnership with action benefits everyone.

Institutional Partnerships

The larger view of partnerships must occur at the institutional level. There is a glaring absence of research into the effects of high mobility, particularly as reflected in the lives of military children. Therefore, partnerships between institutions of higher learning, schools, and military installations will be productive in gaining a more comprehensive perspective. Marjorie Ryan Petcovic points up this need, saying,

> Researchers and educators need to investigate student mobility effects on instruction, classroom management, and learning. Substantial literature exists describing classroom instruction and managerial processes, but treats student mobility as a problem of missing data or simple attrition rather than as a managerial and in-

structional challenge to teachers that deserves examination in its own right. (1996, p.3)

An example of this type of partnership can be seen in the Process Action Team (PAT). Appointed by then Army Chief of Staff General Dennis J. Reimer in early 1997, PAT was charged to discern what was working or not working for military children as they moved and changed schools. The PAT team was expected to bring back recommendations to the Army Senior Leadership.

The experience turned out to be a labor of love for the Education 2000, Process Action Team. This PAT's focus was on social, emotional, and academic issues pertaining to Army school-aged family members. Their work was conducted within a thoughtful structure through which personal accounts and experiences by military students and military parents were gathered. The PAT team's extensive data collection effort included information from selected civilian public schools and Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) and site visits on three continents. The results were analyzed, and recommendations were made to the Army Senior Leadership (Hickey 1999).

One major outcome of the PAT study was the conviction that definitive research needs to be conducted on the essential issues defined by the study, most of which focus on high school transitions. Thus, in February 1999, the Army joined MCEC to study systematically the personal and contextual experiences of both high school students and their schools. The Army formally sponsored this study, called the Secondary

Education Transition Study (SETS). As of this writing, that study is still in progress. The following sites have been chosen for study:

- Fort Campbell and Fort Campbell Schools, Kentucky
- Fort Hood and Killeen Independent School District, Texas
- Fort Benning and Muscogee County Public Schools, Georgia
- Fort Lewis and Clover Park School District No. 400, Washington
- Fort Sill and Lawton Public Schools, Oklahoma
- Fort Bragg and Cumberland County Public Schools, North Carolina
- Fort Bliss and El Paso Independent School District, Texas

Overseas schools sponsored by the Department of Defense in Baumholder, Germany, and Taegu and Seoul, Korea, also are included in the study.

The results of SETS will be used to shape action plans at the target sites. Moreover, SETS results will be used by the Army to write a servicewide action plan.

A World of Possibilities

Often the question is asked, "Why now, finally?" After all, military children and military mobility are nothing new. The issues have been known for decades.

There is no easy answer. But there are some possible answers. One is that the military establishment has become increasingly aware of its families. Gone is the time

when the maxim, "If the Army wanted you to have a wife, son, we'd have issued you one," held sway. Today's military is a family affair.

Schools serving military children also have become more sensitive to the needs of all their mobile students, military and nonmilitary alike. And as schools have reached out to involve parents and the communities they serve, better technology has become available to lend a hand. Many schools now maintain sites on the World Wide Web, which facilitates dissemination of information, a crucial ingredient in ensuring the successful transition of students and families new to their area.

Another possibility is the advocacy organization, the Military Child Education Coalition. White (1998) writes:

> Finally there is an organization that is dedicated to the education of our military children. The Military Child Education Coalition's mission is simple, but profound: "To establish partnerships, provide networks of schools and military installations for the purpose of establishing support systems and developing processes which address transition and other educational issues related to the military child." In short they are a coalition of military installation/departments, school districts, and professionals who want to support the educational needs of all military children.

Many people are, at last, examining the world of military children and addressing those children's — and their families' — social, emotional, and academic needs. Best of all, many of those people are forming partnerships in order to generate greater insights and more effective action.

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The brother of a World War II seaman killed in action shows his classmates where it happened in this official U.S. Navy photograph, dated April 1944.

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